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LETTER

FROM THE

BISHOP of *SALISBURY*,

Gilbert Burnet

To the CLERGY of his Dioceſe:

To be Read at the

Triennial Viſitation

In *APRIL* and *MAY*, 1708.

My Reverend and Dear Brethren,

SINCE my Attendance here, and ſome other Reaſons, make me conclude, that I cannot Viſit you at this Time in Perſon; I chooſe to ſupply my Abſence in this Way: Which I hope will be more effectual, as well as more permanent, than a Charge deliver'd by Word of Mouth could well be: For I have Order'd a Copy of this to be given to every one of you.

This is my Seventh *Triennial Viſitation:* For I am now in the Twentieth Year of my Epiſcopal Labours; in which I hope I may preſume, and yet with all Humility, to ſay, That my Record is on High, and that I have a Witneſs in your Hearts, that I have endeavoured in ſome meaſure to anſwer the End of my Vocation among you, both Publickly, and from Pariſh to Pariſh; and that I have applied my ſelf chiefly to this one thing, to make you all ſenſible of the Dignity and Duty of your Profeſſion.

You are the *Builders*, the *Watchmen*, the *Stewards*, and the *Paſtors* of the Church of GOD, and of that *Flock* which CHRIST has *purchaſed with his own Blood.* He hath made you His *Ambaſſadors, to beſeech Men, in His ſtead, to be reconciled to GOD.* This is a Character of high Dignity, but likewiſe of the greateſt and moſt important Labour. It is to ſave thoſe Immortal Souls that are put under your Care, and for which you muſt give an Account to GOD, and to the *Chief Shepherd and Biſhop of Souls*, at the Great Day.

Their Blood will be required at your Hands, if they, through your ill Example, bad Conduct, or even Neglect, Die in their Sins, without your giving them faithful Warning, and ſetting the Judgments as well as the Mercies of God before them, in the moſt ſerious manner that you can, both Publickly, and from Houſe to Houſe: On the other hand, they ſhall be to you *a Crown of Rejoycing* in the Great Day, if you have been the happy Inſtruments of reſcuing any of them out of Darkneſs, and of bringing them to this *marvellous Light of the Goſpel*; and if you do your Duty faithfully, tho' without Succeſs, yet when the *Chief Shepherd ſhall appear, you ſhall alſo appear with him in glory.*

Upon your Lives and Labours ſo much depends, that if either the Honour of God or of our Holy Religion can move you, if the Death and Interceſſion of Chriſt are of any Value with you, if the Salvation of your own Souls, and of thoſe Souls committed to you, if the Dignity of your own Character, and a well-govern'd Zeal for this Holy Church, if the Aſſiſtance of God's Spirit, with the Comforts of this Life, and the Hopes of a high Degree

Degree of Bleſſedneſs in the next, can work powerfully on you; and if theſe cannot, what can? Then I am ſure you will meditate ſeriouſly on theſe Things, and *give your ſelves wholly to them*, and that you will ſtudy to make your ſelves the Maſters of all that belongs to your Profeſſions; ſo that your *profiting may appear unto all Men*; and that you may be ready to give an Account of the Hope *that is in you, with Meekneſs and Fear, to every one that asketh you*; having the Grounds of your Faith ſo well laid in your Minds, and ſo clearly order'd in your Thoughts, that the Atheiſtical and the Profane may be afraid of you, and be aſhamed before you.

Watch diligently againſt the Practices of Popiſh Emiſſaries, who improve all the Advantages, that our Follies and Paſſions give them: Let never thoſe Controverſies wear out of your Thoughts, for you cannot tell when you may have Occaſion to uſe them; of which you have had a freſh and eminent Inſtance ſo lately before your Eyes.

Deal with thoſe who divide from us, in a Spirit of Love, and with the Strength of Reaſon, without the Aſperity of Virulent Words, or Unmanly Railings; ſpeak oft to them the Words of Truth and Soberneſs; ſtudy to convince them of the Miſchief they do to the Common Cauſe of our Holy Religion, and our Bleſſed Reformation, by their Separating from us, on Grounds, which the far greateſt Number of the moſt Conſiderable amongſt themſelves, think, as by their Practice they own, that they are not Unlawful: Set often before them the Evil of Separation, with the Diſtractions and other ill Conſequences that follow on it; and do all you can in the Gentleneſs of Chriſt, to bring them to conſider this Matter more ſeriouſly, and to examine the Grounds they go on, without Prejudice, and with a Reſolution to follow Truth where-ever they find it.

I muſt alſo warn you to mark thoſe in our Own Communion, who cauſe Diviſions, and infuſe into Weak and Credulous Minds ill-grounded and unjuſt Jealouſies. Our Union among our Selves, is our Strength, as well as our Glory; and when you ſee Tares

ſpringing up, you may ſay, *An Enemy hath done this.* There are but too juſt Grounds to ſuſpect the ill Deſigns of thoſe who firſt ſet theſe Animoſities on foot, and who began Diſputes that were never thought on, ſince the *Reformation*, till within theſe few Years: The Time in which they were firſt ſtirred, and the Spirit with which they have been ſince carry'd on, gives but too much Ground to ſuſpect an ill Deſign, as well as to diſcern an ill Temper in the Management. It will appear to Poſterity an Unaccountable thing, that Men who own the ſame Doctrin, join in the ſame Worſhip, and ſubmit to the ſame Government, ſhould yet be ſo disjointed and broken one from another as we ſeem to be.

What has been done to raiſe ſo great an Outcry, and create ſuch a Faction againſt us? Or, What has not been done, (bear with me a little in this *folly of Boaſting*) to gain a laſting Intereſt in your Hearts and Affections? We hope we may appeal to your ſelves, whether we have not ſtudied to do our Duty among you in the beſt Manner, and to the beſt Purpoſe we could: Have we not aſſiſted and encouraged you in your Labours on all Occaſions? Have we not uſed all Endeavours to promote Religion, and to ſecure the true Intereſts of the Church and Clergy committed to our Care? We will make no unkind Reflections on the Returns we have met with among you: We wiſh every-body elſe would forget them as intirely as we do. We aſſure you, for our part, we will remember nothing that has paſt, againſt any, who will be ſo kind to us and to themſelves, as to change their Methods for the future; and inſtead of ſowing Jealouſies and evil Surmiſings, will live with their Brethren in the Terms of Brotherly Love, and will ſhew their Superiors the Reſpect due to their Functions.

We will ſtudy to bear with every thing that is Perſonal to our ſelves, for we are the Diſciples of the Croſs; and we ought to learn of Him, who *when he was reviled, reviled not again.*

But we hope you will give no Cauſe for any to ſuſpect your Zeal for the Queen, for the Preſervation of Her and Her Govern-

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ment, and for the Proteſtant Succeſſion. We are now the happieſt, the much happieſt Nation under Heaven. We ſaw indeed a Cloud very lately, as it were, gathered over our Heads, ready to break out; and we were for ſome Weeks under juſt Alarms, not ſo much from the Force our Enemies ſent out to Invade us with, as from the Aſſurances on which they built their Expectations of a great Aſſiſtance within the Kingdom. The Councels of our Enemies have been generally ſo wiſely form'd, and their Meaſures ſo well taken, that we have good reaſon to apprehend the Deſign of Betraying us, was deep laid, and had a great Root. But whither theſe Works of Darkneſs ſhall ever be brought to Light or not, we ſee very viſibly, that Providence, which has ſo often Interpoſed for our Preſervation, and moſt eminently theſe laſt Twenty Years, ſtill watches over us, and continues to protect and defend us. God has loaded us with Bleſſings, even when all the Nations round about us are groaning under heavy and almoſt unſupportable Preſſures.

As we ought in a moſt eminent manner to Bleſs God, who has put us under ſo many happy Diſtinctions of Providence, ſo we ought to acknowledge the bleſſed Inſtruments that convey theſe to us: We owe all the Returns poſſible of Obedience, Duty, Zeal, and Gratitude to Her Majeſty; and next to Her, to thoſe under Her, by whoſe Glorious Adminiſtration we enjoy them all. I hope the Language of Faction, of Murmuring and Repining, is not ſo much as heard among you; but that you ſet your ſelves againſt it, if at any time you hear it in the Mouths of any of the Sons of Belial; that you may repreſs it with ſuch Authority, that they may be aſhamed to ſhew their ill Inclinations, while they appear too viſibly in Oppoſition to the neceſſary Proſecution of a long and heavy War; the Guilt of which, can only be laid at the Doors of the Perfidious Breakers of ſo many Treaties, and the Unjuſt Invaders of thoſe Dominions, which, by the firmeſt Settlements that can paſs among Men, belong to others, in which the Publick Faith, as well as the viſible Intereſts of this Kingdom, are ſo eminently concern'd.

This is not a War of Conqueſt or of Ambition: It is not a War grounded upon Punctilio's of Humour or Honour. The true Queſtion with relation to this War, is, Whether we will lie down and be quiet, till we are made Miſerable without either Remedy or Hope, and till our Religion, our Government, and our Liberty, are at the Mercy of thoſe, who, we know, ſhew no Mercy: Or, Whether we will live frugally, and ſpend leſs; that ſo, by ſupporting the Government with Zeal and Chearfulneſs, we may ſave the Whole to our Selves and to our Poſterity.

Let me, on this Occaſion, charge you, by all that is Sacred, or that is Dear to you, That you will frequently and earneſtly, in your ſecret Prayers to God, pray for a Bleſſing on the Queen, and her Councils, on Her Fleets and Armies, and for Wiſdom and Conduct, Fidelity, Courage and Succeſs to thoſe who Command them all. This is that to which you are bound, and not only by Duty, but Intereſt; for your own Peace and Happineſs is bound up in the Publick Proſperity. The Great *Criſis* ſeems to come on faſt; and we ought to be both Praying and Preparing for it. If God, for our Sins, ſhould give a Reverſe to thoſe glorious Hopes that have for ſome Years looked ſo favourably towards us, we ſhould ſoon become the miſerableſt Nation under Heaven; as, on the other hand, a Return of another Happy Year, would probably put an End to all our Fears and Diſtractions: Let us but ſtudy to render our ſelves fit for ſuch a Bleſſing, and capable to improve it; and then we may hope to ſee a happy Calm, after a long ſucceſſion of devouring Wars.

In the mean while, *My Dear Brethren*, do you withdraw much from the World: Live at Home, retired within your ſelves, following your Studies, and attending on your Functions. Read the Scriptures daily, and meditate much on them; let that be a large part of every Day's Exerciſe: If you read that Inſpired Book with a meaſure of that Spirit from which it came, and with an humble, ſerious and obedient Mind, it will give you another Senſe and Underſtanding, another Light and Reliſh of Divine Matters, than can ever be arrived at by dry Study, or by all the Labours

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of the Brain. If you would join to this, Days of Prayer and Devotion, of Fasting and Mourning, you would quickly arrive at a higher measure of sincere and sublime Piety.

In your Labours, begin with the Youth; for in them the Foundation is to be laid, for all that you may afterwards raise upon it. If there is a School in your Parish, go often to it, and see how the Children are Taught. Do not think it below you to engage in so necessary a Work. Be not satisfied with hearing them say the Words of the *Church-Catechism* by Rote, but make them understand the Meaning of them, without which, Words signifie little, and will be soon forgotten. There is now a great variety of Larger *Catechisms* full of Passages of Scripture, that Explain and Prove them, and these to be sure express Divine Matters always in the best manner: Put these in their Hands; and, at least in the Summer Half-Year, do not think Half an Hour at Evening-Prayer too much, to ask them a portion of these, and to explain it to them. By such Methods, you will lay an early and sure Foundation in their tender Hearts, on which it will be easie afterwards to Build with great Advantage. Thus they may be well prepared for Confirmation; in which, I beg it of you, and charge it on you, be not too easie to present young Children to me, with the Pretence of their having said their Catechism. This I have often heard with Grief; as if the saying a short Form of Words by rote, could be a sufficient Preparation to that solemn renewing the Vow of Baptism; which the Preface of the Office directs, should be done when Children come to Years of Discretion; that so, upon Knowledge and Choice, they may Declare and Vow themselves Christians. So I hope you will study to have some reasonable Conviction of this, before you present any to me on so great an Occasion.

I leave all the other Parts of your Duty upon your Consciences, desiring you often to read over the Vows you made when you were admitted into Holy Orders, and to compare your Practice with them; that so you may discern wherein you have fail'd in your Duty, and be directed how to do it better for the future.

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In all which, I commend you to God, in my most earnest Prayers for you, that He may guide you by his Counsel, support and prosper you by his Providence, assist you inwardly by his Spirit, and afterwards receive you into his Kingdom and Glory.

This is daily offered up to GOD for you, by him who is, with great Sincerity and Affection,

Reverend and Dear Brethren,

Your Brother and Fellow-Labourer,

And humble Servant in the LORD,

LONDON,
15 April,
1708.

Gi. Sarum.